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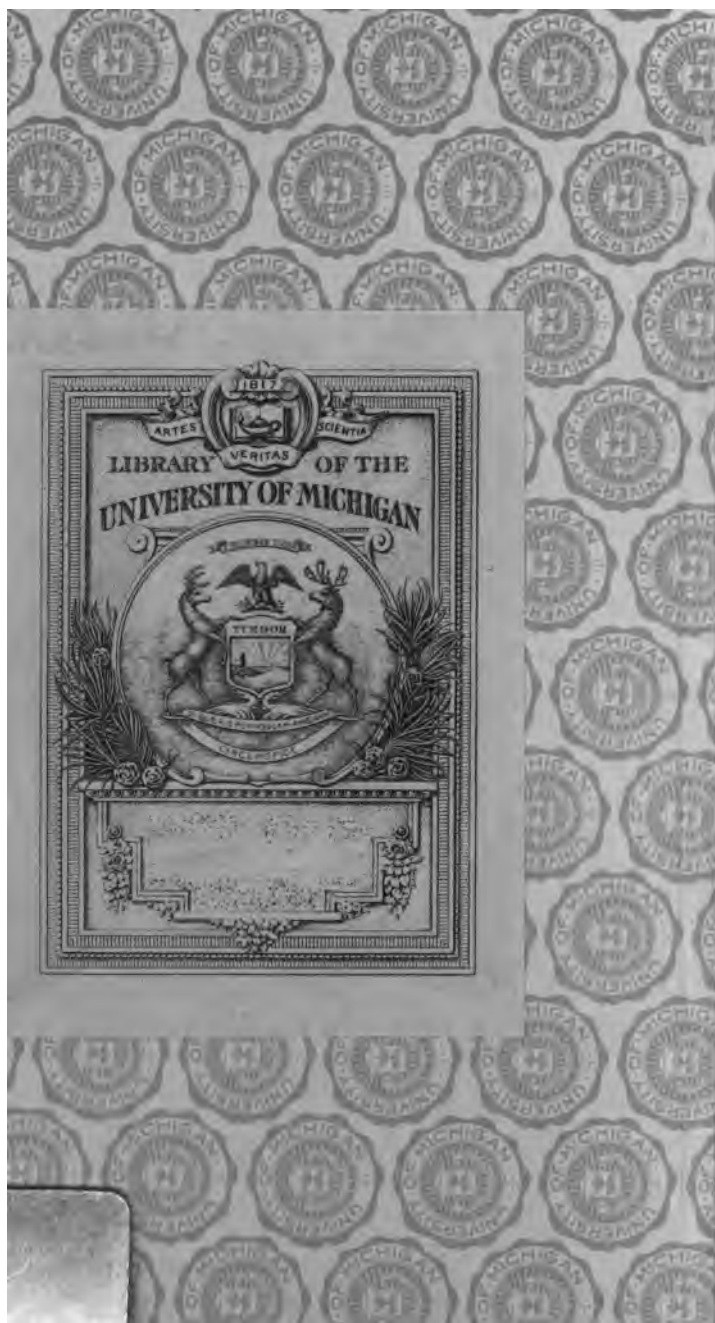
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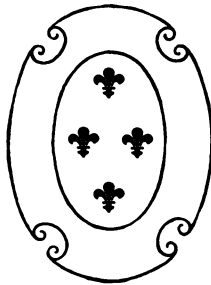
“AND FROM THAT HOUR THEY WERE FAST FRIENDS”

L I V E S O F
T W O C A T S

Vieilles Amis
From the French of Pierre Loti

TRANSLATION BY M. B. RICHARDS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. E. ALLEN



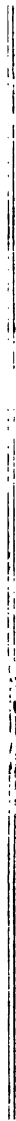
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
“And from that hour they were fast friends” (page 50) . <i>Frontispiece</i>	
“Rolling on the crimson rug” . . .	10
“Advancing, . . . her clear eyes fixed on mine”	16
“And still looked directly in my eyes” .	22
“She passed deliciously dreamy days” .	48
“There was a useless battle”	70
“In company of the everlasting tortoise”.	76
“I was glad . . . that she had not died elsewhere”	90



Lives of Two Cats

• (I) •

I HAVE often seen, with a questioning restlessness infinitely sad, the soul of animals meet mine from the depths of their eyes: the soul of a cat, the soul of a dog, the soul of a monkey, as pathetically, for an instant, as a human soul, revealing itself suddenly in a glance and seeking my own soul with tenderness, supplication, or terror; and I have felt perhaps more pity for these souls of animals than for those of my own brethren, because they are speechless, incapable of emerging from their semi-intelligence; above all, because they are more humble and despised.

L I V E S O F

• (I I) •

THE two cats whose histories I am about to write are associated in memory with comparatively happy years of my life, — years scarce past by the dates they bear, but years already seeming in the remote past, borne away by the frightfully accelerating speed of time, and which, placed beside the gray to-day, bear tints of early dawn or last rosy light of morning. So fast our days hasten to the twilight, so fast our fall to the night.

T W O C A T S

• (I I I) •

PARDON me that I call each of my cats Pussy. At first I had no idea of giving names to my pets. A cat was "Pussy," a kitten "Kitty;" and surely no names could be more expressive and tender than these. I shall call the poor little personages of my story by the names they bore in their real lives, Pussy White and Pussy Gray; the latter often known as Pussy Chinese.

L I V E S O F

• (I V) •

AS the oldest, allow me first to present the Angora, Pussy White. Her visiting card, by her desire, was thus inscribed —

MADAME MOUMOUTTE BLANCHE PREMIÈRE CHATTE Chez M. Pierre Loti.

On a memorable evening nearly twelve years ago, I saw her for the first time. It was a winter's evening, on one of my returns home at the close of some Eastern campaign. I had been in the house but a few moments, and was warming myself

T W O C A T S

before a blazing wood fire, seated between my mother and my aunt Clara. Suddenly something appeared on the scene, bounding like a panther, and then rolling itself wildly on the hearth rug like a live snowball on its crimson ground. "Ah!" said aunt Clara, "you don't know her; I will introduce her; this is our new inmate, Pussy White! We thought we would have another cat, for a mouse had found our closet in the saloon below."

The house had been catless for a long time; succeeding the mourning for a certain African cat that I had brought home from my first voyage and worshiped for two years, but who one fine morning, after a short illness, breathed out her little foreign soul, giving me her last conscious glance, and whom I had afterward buried beneath a tree in the garden.

I lifted for a closer view the roll of fur which lay so white on the crimson mat. I held her carefully with both hands, in a

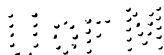
L I V E S O F

position cats immediately comprehend, and say to themselves, "Here is a man who understands us; his caresses we can gratefully condescend to receive."

The face of the new cat was very prepossessing. The young, brilliant eyes, the tip of a pink nose, and all else lost in a mass of silken Angora fur; white, warm, clean, exquisite to fondle and caress. Besides, she was marked nearly like her predecessor from Senegal, which fact probably decided the selection of my mother and aunt Clara, — to the end that I might finally regard the two as one, in my somewhat fickle affections. Above the cat's ears, a capote shaped spot, jet black in color, was set straight, forming a band over the bright eyes; another and larger spot, shaped like a cape, lay over her shoulders; a plummy black tail, moving like a superb train or an animated fly-brush, completed the costume. Her breast, belly, and paws were white as the down of a swan; her

T W O C A T S

“total” gave me the impression of a ball of animated fur; light, soft, and moved by some capricious hidden spring. After making my acquaintance, Pussy White left my arms to recommence her play. And in these first moments of arrival, inevitably melancholy, because they marked another epoch in my life, the new black and white cat obliged me to busy my thoughts with her, jumping on my knee to reiterate my welcome, or stretching herself with feigned weariness on the floor, that I might better admire the silken whiteness of her belly and neck. So she gambolled, the new cat, while my eyes rested with tender remembrances on the two dear faces which smiled on me, somewhat aged and framed in grayer curls; upon the family portraits which preserved their expression and age in their frames upon the walls; upon the thousand objects seen in their accustomed places; upon the well known furniture of this hereditary dwelling immovably fixed



L I V E S O F

there, while my unquiet, restless, changing being had roamed over a changing world.

And this is the persistent, distinct image of our Pussy White, with me still, long after her death : an embodied frolic in fur, snowy white and bounding or rolling on the crimson rug between the sombre black robes of my mother and aunt Clara, in the evening of one of my great returns.

Poor Pussy ! During the first winter of her life she was usually the familiar demon, the hearthstone imp, who enlivened the loneliness of the blessed guardians of my home, my mother and aunt Clara. While I sailed over distant seas, when the house resumed its grand emptiness, in sombre twilights and interminable December nights, she was their constant attendant, though often their tormentor ; leaving upon their immaculate black gowns, precisely alike, tufts of her white fur. With reckless indiscretion she took forcible possession of a place on their laps, their work





“ROLLING ON THE CRIMSON RUG”

L I V E S O F

During the beautiful month of May she seemed seized by yearnings for space and freedom ; then she made excursions on the walls, the roof, through the lanes, in the neighboring gardens, and even nocturnal absences, which I should here state were unaccountable in the austere circle where fate had placed her.

In summer she was languid as a creole. For entire days she lay lazily in the sunshine on the old wall top among the honeysuckles and roses, or, extended on the tiled walks, turned her white belly to the sun amidst the pots of red or golden cacti.

Extremely careful of her little person, always neat, correct, aristocratic, even to the ends of her toes, she was haughtily disdainful of other cats, and conducted herself as if ill bred if any neighbor cat called on her. In this courtyard, which she considered her own domain, she conceded no right of entry. If, above the adjoining

T W O C A T S

garden wall, two ear tips, a cat's nose, rose timidly, or if something stirred in the vines or moss, she upsprang like a young fury, bristling angrily to the tip of her tail, impossible to restrain, quite beside herself! Cries in harsh tones and bad taste followed, struggles, blows, and savage clawings.

In fact, our pet was ferociously independent. She was also extremely affectionate when so inclined, caressing, cajoling, uttering so gentle a cry of joy, a tremulous "miaou" every time she returned from one of her vagabond tramps in the vicinity.

She was then five years old, in the mature beauty of an Angora, with superb attitudes of dignity and the graces of a queen. I had become much attached to her in the course of my absences and returns, considering her one of our home treasures, when there appeared on the scene — three thousand miles afar in the Gulf of Pe-

L I V E S O F

kin, and of a far less distinguished family than the Angoras — the kitten destined to become her inseparable friend, the most unique little personage I have yet known, “Pussy Gray” or “Pussy Chinese.”

T W O C A T S

• (V) •

MADAME MOUMOUTTE CHINOISE
DEUXIÈME CHATTE
Chez M. Pierre Loti.

MOST singular was the destiny which united to me this cat of the yellow race, progeny of obscure parentage and destitute of all beauty.

It was at the close of our last foreign war, one of those evenings of revelry which often occurred at that time. I know not how the little distraught creature, driven from some wrecked junk or sampan, came on board our warship, in great terror, seek-

L I V E S O F

ing a refuge in my cabin beneath my berth. She was young, not half grown, thin and melancholy, having doubtless, like her relatives and masters, subsisted meanly on fishes' heads with a bit of cooked rice. I pitied her much and bade my servant give her food and drink.

With an unmistakable air of humility and gratitude she accepted my kindness,— and I can see her now, creeping slowly toward the unhopèd-for repast, advancing first one foot, then another, her clear eyes fixed on mine to assure herself that she was not deceived, that it was really intended for her.

In the morning I wished to turn her away. After giving her a farewell breakfast, I clapped my hands loudly, and stamping both feet together by way of emphasis, I said in a harsh tone, "Get out, go away, little Kitty!"

But no, she did not go, the little pagan. Evidently she felt no fear of me, intuitively

T W O C A T S

certain that all this angry noise was a pretense. With an air that seemed to say, "I know very well that you will not harm me," she crouched silently in the corner, lying close to the floor in a supplicating attitude, fixing upon me two dilated eyes, alight with a human look that I have never seen except in hers.

What could I do? Impossible to domicile a cat in the contracted cabin of a warship. Besides, she was such a distressingly homely little creature, what an encumbrance by and by!

Then I lifted her carefully to my neck, saying to her, "I am very sorry, Kitty;" but I carried her resolutely the length of the deck, to the further end of the battery, to the sailors' quarters, who usually are both fond of and kind to cats of whatever age or pedigree.

Flattened close to the deck, her head imploringly turned towards me, she gave me one beseeching look; then rose and fled

L I V E S O F

with a queer and swift gait in the direction of my cabin, where she arrived first in the race between us ; when I entered I found her crouched obstinately in the corner from which I had taken her, with an expression, a remonstrance in her golden eyes, that deprived me of all courage to again take her away. And this is the way by which Pussy Chinese chose me for her owner and protector.

My servant, evidently on her side from the début of the contest, completed immediate preparations for her installment in my cabin, by placing beneath my bed a lined basket for her bed, and one of my large Chinese bowls, very practically filled with sand ; an arrangement which froze me with fright.

T W O C A T S

• (V I) •

DAY and night she lived for seven months in the dim light and unceasing movement of my cabin, and gradually an intimacy was established between us, simultaneously with a faculty of mutual comprehension very rare between man and animal.

I recall the first day when our relations became truly affectionate. We were far out in the Yellow Sea, in gloomy September weather. The first autumnal fogs had gathered over the suddenly cooled and restless waters. In these latitudes cold and cloud come suddenly, bringing to us Euro-

L I V E S O F

pean voyagers a sadness whose intensity is proportioned to our distance from home. We were steaming eastward against a long swell which had arisen, and rocked in dismal monotony to the plaintive groans and creakings of the ship. It had become necessary to close my port, and the cabin received its sole light through the thick bull's-eye, past which the crests of the waves swept in green translucency, making intermittent obscurity. I had seated myself to write at the little sliding table, the same in all our cabins on board, — during one of those rare moments, when our service allows a complete freedom and peace, and when the longing comes to be alone as in a cloister.

Pussy Gray had lived under my berth for nearly two weeks. She had behaved with great circumspection; melancholy, showing herself seldom, keeping in darkest corners as if suffering from homesickness and pining for the land to which there was no return.

T W O C A T S

Suddenly she came forth from the shadows, stretched herself leisurely, as if giving time for farther reflection, then moved towards me, still hesitating with abrupt stops; at times affecting a peculiarly Chinese gesture, she raised a fore paw, holding it in the air some seconds before deciding to make another advancing step; and all this time her eyes were fixed on mine with infinite solicitude.

What did she want of me? She was evidently not hungry: suitable food was given her by my servant twice daily. What then could it be?

When she was sufficiently near to touch my leg, she sat down, curled her tail about her, and uttered a very low mew; and still looked directly in my eyes, as if they could communicate with hers, which showed a world of intelligent conception in her little brain. She must first have learned, like other superior animals, that I was not a thing, but a thinking being, capable of

L I V E S O F

pity and influenced by the mute appeal of a look ; besides, she felt that my eyes were for her eyes, that they were mirrors, where her little soul sought anxiously to seize a reflection of mine. Truly they are startlingly near us, when we reflect upon it, animals capable of such inferences.

As to myself, I studied for the first time the little visitor who for two weeks had shared my lodging : she was fawn-colored like a wild rabbit, mottled with darker spots like a tiger, her nose and neck were white ; homely in effect, mainly consequent on her extremely thin and sickly condition, and really more odd looking than homely to a man freed like myself from all conventional ideas of beauty. Besides, she was quite unlike our French cats : low on the legs, very long bodied, a tail of unusual length, large upright ears, and a triangular face ; all her charm was in the eyes, raised at the outer corners like all eyes of the extreme Orient, of a fine golden yellow



T W O C A T S

instead of green, and ever changing, astonishingly expressive.

While examining her, I laid my hand gently upon her queer little head, stroking the brown fur in a first caress.

Whatever she experienced was an emotion beyond mere physical pleasure ; she felt the sentiment of a protection, a pity for her condition of an abandoned foundling. This, then, was why she came out of her retreat, poor Pussy Gray; this was why she resolved, after so much hesitation, to beg from me not food or drink, but, for the solace of her lonely cat soul, a little friendly company and interest.

Where had she learned to know that, this miserable outcast, never stroked by a kind hand, never loved by any one, — if not perhaps in the paternal junk, by some poor Chinese child without playthings, and without caresses, thrown by chance like a useless weed in the immense yellow swarm, miserable and hungry as herself, and whose

L I V E S O F

incomplete soul in departing, left behind no more trace than her own ?

Then a frail paw was laid timidly upon me — oh ! with so much delicacy, so much discretion ! — and after looking at me a long time beseechingly, she decided to venture upon my knee. Jumping there lightly she curled herself in a light, small mass, making herself small as possible and almost without weight, never taking her eyes from me. She lay a long time thus, much in my way, but I had not the heart to dislodge her, which I should doubtless have done had she been a gay pretty kitten in the bloom of kittenhood. As if in fear at my least movement, she watched me incessantly, not fearing that I should harm her — she was too intelligent to think me capable of that — but with an air that seemed to ask : “Is it true that I do not weary you, that I do not trouble you ? ” and then, her eyes growing still more tender and expressive, saying to mine very plainly : “ On this

T W O C A T S

dismal autumn day, so depressing to the soul of cats, since we two are here so lonely, in this abode so strange, so unquiet, shaken and lost amid I know not what dangerous and endless space, can we not give to each other a little of that sweet thing, immaterial and beyond the power of death, which is called affection and which sometimes shows itself in a caress?"

L I V E S O F

• (V I I) •

AS soon as the treaty of friendship was signed between this cat and myself, anxieties arose within me concerning her future. What could I do with her? Carry her to France over so many thousand miles and difficulties innumerable? To be sure, my home would be for her the unhoped-for asylum where the short mysterious dream of her little life would pass with least suffering and most peace. But I could not see, without forebodings, this sickly, illy-robed foreigner the fellow resident of our superb Pussy White, so jealous, who would certainly drive her from the

T W O C A T S

premises as soon as she appeared. No, that was impossible.

On the other side, to abandon her at our next port of call, among chance new friends — that was equally impossible ; I could have done so had she been vigorous and beautiful, but this melancholy little creature, with her human eyes, held me to her by a profound pity.

L I V E S O F

• (V I I I) •

OUR intimacy, founded on mutual loneliness, constantly increased. Weeks and months passed, on the never resting seas, while all remained the same in the obscure corner of the ship where Pussy had chosen her abode. For us men who sail the seas there are always the strong winds that buffet us, the starry nights on deck, and the goings on shore in foreign ports—always some event to break the monotony of sea life. She, on the contrary, knew nothing of the vast world over which her prison moved, nothing of her kindred, or of the sun, or of verdure, or of

T W O C A T S

shade. And, never going outside, she lived in the solitude of my narrow cabin ; it was a glacial place at times when the door swung open to the fierce wind sweeping the decks ; oftener it was a hot and stifling furnace, where Chinese incense burned before the expatriated idols as if in a Buddhist temple. For companions in her musings she had monsters in wood or bronze, fixed to the walls, and grinning with malicious laughter ; in the midst of a mass of relics of things sacred in her country, pilaged from dwellings and temples, she wasted away, without air, among the silken hangings that she loved to tear with her restless little claws.

As soon as I entered my cabin she would come forward with her soft welcoming cry of joy, springing like a jack in the box from behind some curtain, desk, or chest. If by chance I seated myself to write, she very slyly, very tenderly, seeking protection and caresses, would softly

L I V E S O F

take her place on my knees and follow the comings and goings of my pen, — sometimes effacing, with an unintentional stroke of her paw, lines of whose tenor she disapproved.

The shocks, the pitchings of the ship in rough weather, the noise of our cannon, gave her great terror: at these times, she threw herself against the walls, spun around like a mad creature, after which she would stop breathless, and hide herself in the darkest corner, with a terrified and sad expression.

Her cloistered youth resulted in an unnatural state of invalidism, becoming daily more and more pronounced. Her appetite continued normal, but she was emaciated, her face grew, if possible, more triangular, her ears pointed sharply and bat-like, her large golden eyes sought mine with an air of distress, uncomfortably humanlike, or with questionings on the problem of life, perhaps equally troubling and far more

T W O C A T S

unanswerable to her little intelligence than to my own.

She was very curious about outside matters, despite her unaccountable determination never to cross the threshold of my door, and never failed to examine with extreme attention any new object brought to our common lodging, probably giving her confused impressions of the foreign ports where our ship called. In India, for example, I remember she was once deeply interested, even to the total neglect of her breakfast, in a bouquet of fragrant orchids, — so extraordinary for her who had never known garden or forest, never seen other than the withered or dead flowers in my bronze vases. As an offset to her rough and discolored fur, which at first sight gave her a gutter-cat air, she was finely formed, and the least movement of her delicate paws was of patrician grace. While watching her, I sometimes fancied her some little enchanted princess, condemned by wicked

L I V E S O F

fairies to share my solitude in this lowly guise; and I called to mind a story of the mother of the great Tchengiz-Khan, which an old Armenian priest of Constantinople, my teacher of the Turkish language, had given me to translate :

“The young princess Ulemalik-Kurekli, doomed before her birth to die if she beheld the light of day, lived shut up in an obscure dungeon. And she asked her servants : ‘Is this what they call the world? Tell me, is there anything else outside these walls? is this tower in something?’

“‘No, princess, this is not the world : that is outside and very much larger. And there are also things they call stars, that they call sun and they call moon.’

“‘Oh!’ replied Ulemalik, ‘let me die, but let me see them!’”

T W O C A T S

• (I X) •

IT was at the close of winter, one of the first warm days of March, that Pussy Chinese made her début at my home in France. Pussy White still wore at that season her royal winter robe, and I had never seen her more imposing. The contrast would be the more overwhelming for my poor favorite, lean, lank, with her faded fawn-colored fur looking as if moth-eaten. I felt myself much embarrassed when our man Sylvester, returning with my pet from the ship, lifted, with a half disdainful air, the cover of the basket where he had placed her, and I saw, in the midst

L I V E S O F

of the assembled family, my little Chinese friend creep tremblingly forth.

Most deplorable was her first appearance. I felt the impression of the group in Aunt Clara's simple exclamation: "Oh! my friend, how homely she is!"

Homely indeed! And in what way, under what pretense could I present her to the magnificent Pussy White? In utter helplessness I had her carried, for the time being, to an isolated granary, — that I might gain time to reflect on the situation.

T W O C A T S

• (X) •

THEIR first interview was certainly terrible. It was unpremeditated, a few days after, in the kitchen (a locality of irresistible attractions, where the cats of the same household, do what one can to prevent, will some day meet). The servants summoned me hastily and I ran to the battlefield, where, uttering unearthly yells, a shapeless package of fur and claws formed of their closely clinched little bodies, rolled and bounded, — shattering glasses, plates, and dishes, while tufts of white fur, gray fur, black fur, and fawn fur flew and floated everywhere. It was necessary to interfere

L I V E S O F

energetically and instantly : to separate them
I threw upon them a whole carafe of water.
I was at my wits' end.

T W O C A T S

• (X I) •

BREATHLESS, scratched, and bleeding, her heart beating as if it must break, Pussy Gray was gathered to my breast, where she clung closely, growing more quiet in the consciousness of sweet security ; then she became less and less rigid and as limp and inert as if dying, which is a way cats have of showing entire confidence in one who holds them. Pussy White, seated thoughtful and gloomy in a corner, looked at us with surprised eyes, and a deduction from the view was formed in her little jealous brain ; that she, who from one year's end to the other had driven

L I V E S O F

from the neighboring walls all other cats, unwilling even to endure their presence, must acknowledge this ugly pagan as mine, since I held her so tenderly, so closely ; then it became necessary that she, Pussy White, should tolerate her presence in the mansion and trouble her no more.

My surprise and admiration were great to see these two, an instant after, pass by each other, not merely with indifference but calmly, civilly, — and all was ended. During their lives they never quarreled again.

T W O C A T S

• (X I I) •

THE springtime of the following year!
How pleasant my reminiscences of
its sunny days.

Very short as all seasons now seem, it
was the last which held a charm for me,
like the mysterious enchantment of child-
hood's days, passed in the same environ-
ment of verdure and bloom, in the midst
of flowers blooming anew in their annual
ranks, the same jasmines, the same roses.
After my campaigns I joyfully returned
there, to forget other continents and the
immense seas; again, as in my infancy,
I limited the exterior world to the old

L I V E S O F

walls hung with vines and mosses, which bounded my rambles ; the distant lands where I have since lived seeming unreal as those of which I dreamed, having never seen. The far horizons fade ; they vanish imperceptibly and nothing is real to me save our mossy stones, our trees, our trellises, and our beloved white roses !

At that time, I had built in a corner of my mansion a Buddhist pagoda, the collected débris of original temples. From the large cases opened daily in the courtyard in the warm sunshine there arose that indefinable and mingled odor of China, from pedestals of columns, bas-reliefs of ceilings, carved altars, and mouldy old idols and vases. It was interesting and unique, this unpacking ; to watch these grotesque objects reappearing one by one, arranging themselves, as it were, on the grass or the mossy pavement, — all this assembly of monsters of far Asia, bearing on their faces the same frowns and grimaces they had

T W O C A T S

borne for ages. Occasionally my mother and Aunt Clara would come out to look at them, astonished at their overwhelming ugliness. Pussy Gray was the most interested spectator of these unpackings ; recognizing her ocean surroundings, she sniffed all with confused memories of her native land ; afterward, habituated to dwelling so long in semi-darkness, she would crawl into the boxes and hide herself in the empty spaces, under the exotic straw still smelling of sandal-wood and musk.

It was an exhilarating and beautiful springtime, bird songs filling the air ; and Pussy Gray thought it marvelous. Poor little recluse, grown up in the stifling obscurity of my rolling home ! Bright sunlight, balmy air, the vicinity of feline friends alike astonished and charmed her. She now made long and exhaustive explorations of the courtyard and garden, smelling every blade of grass, every new plant ; in fact everything that sprang fresh

L I V E S O F

and odorous from the awakened earth. These forms, these colors, old as the world, which plants unconsciously produce every succeeding spring, these immutable laws, perfectly and silently obeyed by unfolding leaf and bursting bud, were phenomena for her who had never known springtime or verdure. And Pussy White, formerly absolute and intolerant queen of the place, had deigned to share her domain with the forlorn stranger, leaving her to roam at will among the evergreens, the potted flowers, or along the promenade on the gray wall-top under the pendent boughs. Pussy Chinese was especially impressed by a miniature lake, so closely interwoven with my infantile memories, which fascinated her for a long time. There, in the grass each day higher and more luxuriant, she crouched close to the earth, like a panther intent on his prey (doubtless inheriting this movement from her ancestors, Mongolian cats with uncultivated manners). She hid

T W O C A T S

behind the lilliputian rocks, buried herself beneath the vines like a little tiger in a miniature virgin forest.

I found great pleasure in watching her goings and comings, her sudden haltings, her surprises ; when she realized that I was watching her, she in turn watched me, posing in an attitude peculiarly her own ; — very graceful, but very like a Chinese belle, with a paw extended as if holding a fan, just as I have seen one holding an article raise coquettishly the little finger ; and her droll golden eyes grew infinitely expressive, “ speaking ” to mine. “ Please permit me to amuse myself ? Does it incommode you in the least ? Look ! I walk with lightness, I play with extreme carefulness, I go about with discretion among these beautiful green things that smell so sweetly, and this good air is so refreshing in this wide, free space ! And these other strange objects that I see in turn high over us, ‘ Things they call stars, that they call sun,

L I V E S O F

and they call moon !' Oh ! how different from our trembling lodging on the ship and how delightful to be here together in this happy place !”

This home, so new to her, was equally for me the oldest, the most familiar of all places on the earth ; whose least details, whose feeblest blade of grass were known to me since the earliest and most impressive days of my existence. So dear to me that I am bound to it with all my being, so dear that I love with a love akin to idolatry the old vines and shrubs which are there, the jasmine, the honeysuckles, and a certain dielytra rose, which every returning March unfolds its precocious leaves, gives the same April roses, fades in the June sun, then burns in August heat and seems to perish.

And while Pussy Gray abandons herself to the joy of youth and springtime, I, on the contrary, knowing that all this will pass away, feel for the first time in my life, shadows like those of evening stealing over

T W O C A T S

my own life, — presages of the inexorable night, the morningless night of the final autumn, — never to be succeeded by spring.

And with profound sadness in this courtyard bright with sunshine, I gaze upon the two dear ones, their silvery hair, their mourning robes — my mother and Aunt Clara, going and coming, stooping down as has been their wont for many springs, to discover what flower seeds had come up, or raising their heads to see the buds of honeysuckles and rose trees. And when their sombre robes vanished from my view, at the end of the green avenue, which is the vestibule of our family residence, I am forced to notice that their steps are slower and less firm. Oh, time, perhaps near, when in the unchanging green avenue I shall behold them no more. Can it be possible that time may arrive? If ever they shall be gone I have the illusion that it will not be an entire departure, so long as I remain there recalling their presence; — that

L I V E S O F

in the quiet summer evenings I shall sometimes see their spirits glide beneath the jasmine ; that something of their existence will still live in the plants they have tended, and breathe from the falling honeysuckle, the old dielytra rose.

T W O C A T S

• (X I I I) •

SINCE her life in open air, my favorite flourished visibly. The bare and unsightly spots in her rabbit-colored coat were covered with new glossy fur ; she was less thin, more careful of her little person, and bore no longer the appearance of a witch's cat. My mother and Aunt Clara often stopped to speak to her, interested in her odd ways, her expressive eyes, and her soft responsive "Trr! trr! trr!" that she never failed to utter when addressed.

"Certainly," they said, "this Chinese pussy seems very happy with us ; no cat's face could show greater content."

L I V E S O F

A happy look, in fact; even a look of gratitude to me, who had brought her to her new home. And the happiness of young animals is perfect, perhaps because they have not, like us, forebodings of the inevitable future.

She passed deliciously dreamy days in most luxuriant idleness, extended on the warm tiles or the soft moss, enjoying the silence — somewhat depressing to me — of this abode where neither the contention of wind and wave or the terrible shock of cannon troubled her repose. She had reached the distant peaceful haven, the last port in her short life's voyage, and rested happily unconscious of the end.

T W O C A T S

• (X I V) •

ONE fine day, without intervention, seized by some sudden whim, the indifference of Pussy White changed to a tender friendship. She came deliberately to Pussy Gray and rubbed her nose against her own affectionately, which is with her race the equivalent of a kiss. Sylvester, who was present at the performance, showed himself skeptical regarding its good intent. "Did you see," said I, "the kiss of peace?" "Oh no, sir!" he replied, in that tone of accomplished connoisseur, assumed whenever any question arises concerning my cats, dogs, horses, or any other animals;

L I V E S O F

“Oh no, sir! it is simply that Pussy White wishes to ascertain if Pussy Gray has been stealing her meat.”

He was mistaken for once nevertheless, — and from that hour they were fast friends. They could be seen sitting in the same chair, eating the same food, even from the same plate, and every morning running to exchange salutations, rubbing together the tips of their soft noses, one yellow, the other pink.

T W O C A T S

• (X V) •

AFTER this we said, "The cats did this or that." They were an intimate and inseparable pair, taking counsel together, following each other in the least and most trivial actions of their lives; and making their toilets together, licking each other with mutual interest.

Pussy White maintained her position as the special cat of Aunt Clara, while the Chinese continued my faithful little friend, holding fast to her old habits of following me with her speaking eyes, and replying in her expressive "Trr-trr-trr," whenever I spoke to her. Scarcely would I be seated

L I V E S O F

before a light paw rested on me, as in the old evenings on the ship; two questioning eyes sought mine, then a bound and she was on my knees, — slowly making her preparations for a nap; plying her fore paws alternately, turning herself round to the right, then to the left, and usually finding the right position by the time I was ready to depart.

What a mystery! A soul's mystery perhaps, this constant affection of an animal and its unchanging gratitude.

T W O C A T S

• (X V I) •

THEY were much spoiled, the two cats; admitted to the dining-room at meal times; often seated one on my right and the other on my left; recalling to me, occasionally, their presence by a light stroke of the paw on my napkin, and watching for tit-bits that I fed them surreptitiously, like a guilty schoolboy, from the tip of my fork.

In recording this, I still farther darken my reputation, which, it seems, is already reputed incorrect and eccentric. I can however criticise a certain member of the Academy, who, having done me the honor

L I V E S O F

of dining at my table, did not refrain from offering to our pussies, even in his own spoon, a little Chantilly cream.

T W O C A T S

• (X V I I) •

THE following summer was for Pussy Gray a period of absolutely delicious life. With her originality and her foreign air, she had grown almost beautiful, so finely reclad in glossy fawn color. All around, in the cat world, in the gardens and on the roofs, the news had circulated of the presence of this piquant stranger; and candidates for her smiles were numerous; they smirked and serenaded beneath her windows in the balmy nights filled with perfume of honeysuckle and rose.

During September, the two cats experi-

L I V E S O F

enced, at almost the same time, the joy of motherhood.

Pussy White, it is needless to relate, was already a well known matron. As to Pussy Gray, when her first moments of surprise had passed, she tenderly licked the precious tiny gray kitten, spotted and mottled like a tiger, — her only son.

T W O C A T S

• (XVIII) •

THE reciprocal attachment of the two families was touching; the comical little Chinese and the little Angora, round as a powder puff, frolicking together, and nourished, washed, and watched by one or the other mother with an almost equal solicitude.

L I V E S O F

• (X I X) •

IN the winter season pussy becomes peculiarly the hearthstone guest, constant companion of the fireside, sharing with us, before the flickering flames, vague melancholies and endless reveries of the long twilights.

Since the first frost Pussy Gray had lost all roughness of her mottled coat, and Pussy White had donned a most imposing cravat, a boa of snowy whiteness that framed her face like a Medici ruff. It is well known that in winter the cat attains its fullest perfection of flesh and fur. Their attachment grew as they warmed

T W O C A T S

themselves together by the fireside; they slept entire days in each other's arms, on the cushions in the armchairs, rolled in a single ball where heads and tails were alike indistinguishable.

Pussy Gray could never get sufficiently close to her friend. Returning from some scamper in open air, if she perceived the Angora sleeping before the fire, she softly, very softly approached her, as if about to spring upon a mouse; the other, always nervous, whimsical, irritated at being disturbed, sometimes gave her a light cuff of disapproval. She never retaliated, the Chinese, but merely raising her little paw, as if quite ready to laugh, then saying to me from a corner of her eyes, "You must allow that she is rather cross! But I don't mind it at all, you may be sure!" Then, with redoubled precaution, she always attained her desired purpose, which was to lay herself completely upon the other, her head sunk in the silky snow, — and be-

L I V E S O F

fore sleeping she said to me, from half-closed eyes: "This is all I wanted! **Here I am!**"

T W O C A T S

• (X X) •

OH! our winter's evenings of that time! In the most sheltered corner of the mansion, elsewhere closed and left silent and dark, was a small and warm parlor facing the sun, the courtyard, and the gardens, where my mother and Aunt Clara sat beneath their hanging lamp, in their usual places where so many past and similar winters had found them. And, usually, I was there also, that I might not lose an hour of their presence on earth and of my days at home near them. On the other side of the mansion, far from us, I abandoned my study, leaving it dark and fireless

L I V E S O F

that I might simply pass my evenings in their dear company, within the cosy room, innermost sanctuary of our family life, the home dearest to us all. (No other spot has given me a fuller, a sweeter impression of a nest; nowhere have I warmed myself with more tranquil melancholy than before the blaze in its small fireplace.) The windows, whose blinds were never closed, so confident were we in our security, the glass door, almost too summer-like, opened upon the desolation of naked trees and vines, brown leaves, and despoiled trellises often silvered by pale moonlight. Not a sound reached us from the street, which was some rods distant, — and besides a very quiet one, its silence rarely broken save by the songs of sailors celebrating, at long intervals, their safe returns. No, we had rather the sounds of the country, whose nearness was felt beyond the gardens and old ramparts of the city; — in summer, immense concerts of frogs in

T W O C A T S

the marshes which surrounded us smooth as steppes, and the intermittent flutelike note of the owl; in the winter evenings of which I write, the shrill cry of the marsh-bird, and above all, the long wail of the west wind coming from the sea.

Upon the round table, covered with a gayly flowered cloth, which I have known all my life, my mother and aunt Clara placed their workbaskets, containing articles that I would fain designate "fondamentales," if I dared employ that word which, in the present instance, will signify nothing save to myself; those trifles, now sacred relics, which hold in my eyes, in my memory, in my life, a supreme importance: embroidery scissors, heirlooms in the family, lent me rarely when a child, with manifold charges to carefulness, that I might amuse myself with paper cutting; winders for thread, in rare colonial woods, brought long years ago from over the oceans by sailors, and giving material for deep

L I V E S O F

reveries; needlecases, thimbles, spectacles, and pocketbooks. How well I know and love every one of them, the trifles so precious, spread out every evening for so many years on the gay old tablecloth, by the hands of my mother and Aunt Clara; after each distant voyage with what tenderness I see them again and bid them my good-day of return! In writing of them I have used the word "fondamentale," so inappropriate I confess, but can only explain it thus: if they were destroyed, if they ceased to appear in their unchanged positions, I should feel as if I had taken a long step nearer the annihilation of my being, towards dust and oblivion.

And when they shall be gone, my mother and Aunt Clara, it seems to me that these precious little objects, religiously treasured after their departure, will recall their presence, will perhaps prolong their stay in our midst.

The cats, naturally, remained usually in

T W O C A T S

our common room, — sleeping together, a warm, soft ball, upon some taboret or cushioned chair, the nearest to the fire. And their sudden awakenings, their musings, their droll ways, cheered our somewhat monotonous evenings.

Once it was Pussy White who, seized by a desire to be in our closer company, leaped upon the table and sat gravely down upon the sewing work of Aunt Clara, turning her back upon her mistress, after unceremoniously sweeping her plummy tail over her face; afterwards remaining there, obstinately indiscreet, and gazing abstractedly at the flame of the lamp. Once in a night of tingling frost, so excitable to a cat's nerves, we heard, in a near garden, an animated discussion: "Miaou! Miaraouraou!" Then from the mute fur ball, which slumbered so soundly, upsprang two heads, two pair of shining eyes. Again: "Miaraou! Miaraou!" The quarrel goes on! The Angora rose up resolutely, her fur bristling in

L I V E S O F

anger, and ran from door to door, seeking an exit as if called outside by some imperative duty of great importance: "No, no, Pussy," said Aunt Clara, "believe me, there is no necessity for your interference; they will settle their quarrel without your help!" And the Chinese, on the contrary, always calm and averse to perilous adventure, contented herself by glancing at me with a knowing air, evidently regarding her friend's movements as ridiculous, and asking me, "Am I not right in keeping away from this fracas?"

A certain beatitude, profound and almost infantile, pervaded the silent little parlor where my mother and Aunt Clara sat at work. And if by turns I remembered, with a dull heart throb, having possessed an oriental soul, an African soul, and a number of other souls, of having indulged, under divers suns, in numberless fantasies and dreams, all that appeared to me as far distant and forever finished. And this roving

T W O C A T S

past led me more thoroughly to enjoy the present hour, the side-scene in this interlude of my life, which is so unknown, so unsuspected, which would astonish many people, and perhaps make them smile. In all sincerity of purpose, I said to myself that nothing could again take me from my home, that nothing could be so precious as the peace of dwelling there, and finding again part of my first soul; to feel around me, in this nest of my infancy, I know not what benignant protection against worthlessness and death; to picture to myself through the window, in all the obscurity of dying foliage, beneath the winter moon, this court-yard which once held my entire world, which has remained the same all these years past, with its vines, its mimic rocks, its old walls, and which may perhaps resume its importance in my eyes, its former greatness, and repeople itself with the same dreams. Above all, I resolved that nothing in the wide world was worth the gentle bliss

L I V E S O F

of watching mother and Aunt Clara sewing at the round table, bending toward the bright flowered cloth their caps of black lace, their coils of silvery hair.

Oh! one evening I will recall. There was 'a scene, a drama among the cats! Even now I cannot recall it without laughter.

It was a frosty night about Christmas time. In the deep silence we had heard passing above the roofs, through cold and cloudless skies, a flock of wild geese, emigrating to other climates: a sound of harsh voices, very numerous, wailing not too harmoniously together and soon lost in the infinite regions of the sky. "Do you hear? Do you hear?" said Aunt Clara with a slight smile and an anxious look to banter me; recalling the fact that in my childhood I was greatly alarmed by these nocturnal flights of birds. To hear their voices one should have a keen ear and listen in an otherwise silent place.

T W O C A T S

Our room then resumed its calm, — a calm so profound that I heard the complaint of the blazing wood on the hearth, and the regular breathing of our cats seated in the chimney corner.

Suddenly, a certain large yellow gentleman cat, held in horror by Pussy White, but persistently pursuing her with his declarations, appeared behind a window pane, showing in full relief against the background of dark foliage, looking at her with an impertinent and excited air and uttering a formidable “Miaou” of provocation. Then she sprang up at the window like a panther, or a ball deftly thrown, and there, nose to nose, on each side of the pane, there was a useless battle, a volley of unpardonable insults poured out in shrill, coarse tones; blows of unsheathed claws given with emphasis, vain scratchings across the glass, which made great noise and did nothing. Oh! the fright of my mother and Aunt Clara, starting from their chairs at the first

L I V E S O F

alarm, — then their hearty laugh afterward, the ridiculousness of all this impetuous racket breaking in upon the intense silence, — and above all the visage of the visitor, the yellow cat, discomfited and breathless, whose eyes blazed so drolly behind the glass!

“Putting the pussies to bed” was in those evenings, one of the important events, — “primordiales” shall I call it? — of our daily existence. They were never allowed, as are many other cats, to roam all night among the vines and flowers, beneath the stars, or contemplating the moon; we held opinions upon that subject from which we never departed and made no compromises.

The going to bed was merely shutting them up in an old granary at the end of the courtyard, almost hidden under a growth of vines and honeysuckles; it was really in Sylvester’s quarters, beside his chamber; so that every evening they said good-night together, the cats and he. When each one

T W O C A T S

of these days — these unappreciated days now wept for — was ended, fallen in the abyss of time, Sylvester was called and my mother would say in a half solemn tone, as if fulfilling a religious duty, “Sylvester, it is time for the cats to go to bed.”

At the first words of this phrase, uttered in ever so low a voice, Pussy White pricked up her ears; then knowing there was no mistake about it, jumped down from her cushion with an important though disturbed air, and ran to the door, that she might make her exit first, and on her own feet, unwilling to be carried, and determined to go of her own free will or not at all. The Chinese, on the contrary, endeavored to delay the inevitable change; reluctant to quit the warm room, she got down slyly, crouching very low on the carpet to be less in view, and glancing around to ascertain if any one had seen her, would hide under some article of furniture. The big Sylvester, accustomed to these subterfuges,

*I agree with you
Mademoiselle*

30

L I V E S O F

see ourselves gathered in the courtyard, in a freezing night, Sylvester also of the group and still holding his cat by the tail, and all this united authority set at defiance by a little cat perched high above us, gave an irresistible desire to laugh at ourselves, beginning with Aunt Clara, and in which we all joined. I have never believed there existed in the entire world two such blessed old ladies, — Oh! how old, alas! — capable of such hearty laughter with the young; knowing so well how to be amiable, how to be gay. Truly I have been happier with them than with any or all others; they always discovered in seemingly insignificant trifles an amusing or comical aspect. Pussy White decidedly had the best of the discussion! We reëntered, crestfallen and chilled, the little room too much cooled by the opened door, to gain our respective chambers by a series of stairways and sombre passages. And Aunt Clara, with a relapse

T W O C A T S.

of anger, when reaching her threshold, said to me, " Good-night ; but, on the whole, what is your opinion of that cat ? "

L I V E S O F

• (X X I) •

THE life of a cat may extend over a period of twelve to fifteen years, if no accident occurs.

Our two pets lived to enjoy together the light and warmth of another delicious summer ; they found again their days of blissful idleness, in company of the everlasting tortoise, Suleïma, whom the years forgot, between the blooming cacti, on the sun-heated pavements, — or stretched on the old wall amidst the profusion of jasmines and roses. They had many kittens, raised with tender care and afterward advantageously domiciled in the neighborhood ; those of the

T W O C A T S

Chinese were in great demand, being of a peculiar color and bearing distinctive race marks.

They lived another winter and recommenced their long naps in the chimney corner, their meditations before the changing aspect of the flame or embers of our wood fire.

But this was their last season of health and joy, and soon after, their decline began. In the succeeding spring some mysterious malady attacked their little bodies, which should have endured vigorous and sound for still some years.

Pussy Chinese, first attacked, seemed stricken by some mental trouble, a sombre melancholy, — regrets perhaps for her native Mongolia. Refusing both food and drink, she made long retreats to the wall top, lying there motionless for entire days; replying only to our appeals by a sorrowful glance and plaintive “Meaou.”

The Angora also, from the first warm

L I V E S O F

days, began to languish, and by April both were really ill.

Doctors, called in consultation, gravely prescribed absurd medicines and impossible treatments. For one, pills morning and evening and poultices applied to the belly ! For the other, a hydropathic course, close shaving of the body, and a cold plunge bath twice daily ! Sylvester himself, who adored the pussies, who obeyed him as they would no one else, declared all this impossible. We then tried the efficacy of domestic remedies ; the mothers Michel were summoned, but their simple prescriptions were of no avail.

They were going from us, our beloved and cherished pets, filling our hearts with great compassion,— and neither the loveliness of spring nor its glory of returning sunshine could rouse them from the torpor of approaching death.

One morning as I arrived from a trip to Paris, Sylvester, while receiving my valise,

T W O C A T S

said to me sadly, "Sir, the Chinese is dead."

She had disappeared for three days, she so orderly, so domestic, who never left our premises. Doubtless, feeling her end near, she had fled, obedient to an impulse or sentiment of extreme modesty which leads some animals to hide themselves to die. "She remained all the week," said Sylvester, "up on the high wall lying on the red jasmin vine, and would not come down to eat or drink; but she always answered when we spoke to her, in such a little feeble voice!

Where then had she gone, poor Pussy Gray, to meet the terrible hour? Perhaps, in her ignorance of the world, to some strange house, where she was not allowed to die in peace, but was tormented, driven out,—and afterwards cast on the dunghill. Truly, I would have chosen that she might die at her home; my heart swelled a little at the remembrance of her strange human

L I V E S O F

glances, so beseeching, so indicative of that need of affection which she could not otherwise express, seeking my own eyes with mute interrogation forever unutterable. — Who knows what mysterious agonies rend the little, disturbed souls of the lower animals in their dying hours?

T W O C A T S

• (X X I I) •

AS if a fatal spell had been cast upon our cats, Pussy White, also, seemed near her end.

By fantasy of the dying, she had selected her last lodging in my dressing-room,— upon a certain lounge whose rose color doubtless pleased her.

There we carried to her a little food, a little milk, which were alike untasted; she looked at us whenever we entered, with kind eyes, glad to see us, and still purred feebly when caressed.

Then, one pleasant morning, she also disappeared, and we thought she would return no more.

• (X X I I I) •

SHE did return, however, and I recall nothing more sad than her reappearance. It was about three days after, in one of those delightful periods at the commencement of June, which shine and glow in the unclouded heavens, — deceivers with promises of eternal duration, woeful to beings born to die. Our courtyard displayed all its leaves, all its flowers, all its roses upon its walls, as in so many past Junes; the martinets, the swallows, exhilarated with light and life, darted about with songs of joy in the blue above us; there was a universal festival of things without Soul and gay animals unconscious of death.

T W O C A T S

Aunt Clara, walking there, watching the opening blossoms, called to me suddenly, and her voice showed that something unusual had occurred.

“Oh! come! look here. — Our poor Pussy has returned.”

She was there indeed, reappearing as a wretched little phantom, emaciated, weak, her fur already discolored with earth; — she was half dead. Who knows what emotion led her home: an afterthought, a lack of courage at the last hour, a longing to see us once more!

With extreme exertion she had surmounted the lower wall, so familiar, which she was wont to cross in two bounds, when she returned from her beat of police guard, to cuff some acquaintance, to correct some neighbor. Breathless from her supreme effort, she lay extended on the new grass at the margin of the mimic lake, bending her poor head to lap a mouthful of fresh water. And her imploring eyes called for

L I V E S O F

aid. "Do you not see that I am dying? Can you do nothing to help me live a little longer?"

Presages of death everywhere, this fair June morning, beneath its resplendent sky: Aunt Clara, leaning over her suffering favorite, seemed to me suddenly, so old, feebler than ever before, ready also to go from us.

We decided to carry Pussy White back to the dressing-room, and place her on the rose-colored lounge she herself had chosen the preceding week, and which had seemed to please her. I resolved to watch carefully that she should not depart again, that at least her bones might rest in the earth of our courtyard, that she should not be thrown on some dunghill, — like that of my poor Chinese companion, whose anxious eyes still haunted me. I held her to my breast with careful tenderness, and, contrary to her habitude, she allowed herself to be carried, this time, in complete confidence, her drooping head leaning on my arm.

T W O C A T S

Upon the rose-colored lounge she struggled against death for three days, so great is a cat's vitality. The sun shone on the mansion and the gardens around us. We continued to visit her often, and she always endeavored to rise to greet us with a grateful and pathetic air, her eyes telling as plainly as those of a human being the presence and the distress of what we call the soul.

One morning I found her dead, rigid, her open eyes glassy, expressionless,— a corpse, a thing to be hidden from view. Then I bade Sylvester make a grave in a terrace of the courtyard, at the foot of a tree. Whither had fled that which I had seen shine forth from her dying eyes; the restless Spark within, whither had it gone?

• (X X I V) •

THE burial of Pussy White, in the quiet courtyard, under the blue sky of June, in the full sunlight of two o'clock!

At the chosen place Sylvester dug the grave, — then stopped, looking at the bottom of the excavation, and stooping to pick up something that surprised him. “What is this,” said he, stirring the small white bones which he had discovered, — “a rabbit?”

The bones of an animal, indeed; those of my cat from Senegal, an old pussy, my companion in Africa, very much beloved long ago, that I had buried there a dozen

T W O C A T S

years before, and then forgotten, in the abyss where beings and things that disappear forever accumulate. And while looking at these bones mingled with the earth, these tiny legs like white sticks, this collection still suggesting what was once the back and tail of an animal, — there arose before me, with an inclination to smile and a heavy heart-throb, a scene well-nigh forgotten, a certain occasion when I had seen this same posterior of a cat, clothed in agile muscles and in silky fur, fly before me comically, tail in air, in the very height of terror.

It was one day when, with the obstinacy natural to her race, she had climbed again on a piece of furniture twenty times forbidden, and had there broken a vase which I prized very highly. I had at first given her a cuff; then my temper rising, I followed it by a rather brutal kick. She, surprised only by the blow, realized by the succeeding kick that war was declared; it

L I V E S O F

was then that she swiftly fled, her plummy tail in the air, and from her refuge beneath the sofa she turned around to give me a reproachful and distressed look, believing herself lost, betrayed, assassinated by him she loved, and to whose hands she had confided her fate; and as my eyes still were angry she uttered finally her cry of surrender, of hopeless despair, that peculiar and sinister cry of animals that realize themselves on the verge of death. All my anger vanished; I called her, caressed her, still trembling and panting, upon my knees. Oh! the last agonized cry of an animal, be it that of the ox, drawn down to the abattoir, even that of the miserable rat held between the teeth of a bull-dog; that hopeless appeal, addressed to no one, which seems a protest addressed to nature itself, — an appeal to an unknown, impersonal mercy, pervading all space.

Two or three bones sunken at the foot of a tree is all now remaining of the once

T W O C A T S

cherished creature that I recall so living and so droll. And her flesh, her little person, her attachment to me, her intense terror on a certain occasion, her precipitate flight, her plaintive reproach, all finally that encompassed these bones,—has become a little earth. When the hole was sufficiently deep, I went upstairs where all that remained of our beautiful Angora lay rigid on the rose-colored lounge. And in descending with my light burden, I found, in the courtyard, my mother and Aunt Clara seated on a bench in the shade, assuming to be there by chance, and pretending to converse unconcernedly: that we should thus assemble expressly for this burial would seem rather ridiculous, and we perhaps should have smiled despite our grief.

There never glowed a brighter day; never was balmier silence, unbroken save by the hum of insects; the garden was in full bloom, the rose-trees white with their blos-

L I V E S O F

soms; the peace of the country brooded over the neighborhood, the martinets and swallows slept, the everlasting tortoise, most lively when the sun shone hotly, trotted aimlessly to and fro on the pavement. Everything was imbued with the melancholy of too tranquil skies, of a season too monotonous, of the oppression of noonday. Against the fresh green verdure, the dazzling brightness of color, the two similar robes of my mother and Aunt Clara formed two intensely black spots. Their silvery heads were bowed down as if somewhat weary of having seen and reseen so many times, almost eighty times, the deceitful renewal. Everything around them, trees, birds, insects, and flowers, seemed chanting the triumph of their perpetual resurrection, regardless of the fragile beings who listened, already agonized by the pre-sage of their inevitable end.

I laid Pussy White in her grave, and the black and white fur disappeared under

T W O C A T S

a falling mass of earth. I was glad that I had succeeded in keeping her in her last days with us, that she had not died elsewhere like the other; at least her body would decay in our courtyard, where for so long a period she had laid down the law for all cats of the neighborhood, where she had idled away the summer hours on the vine-covered wall, and where on winter nights, at her capricious hour for retiring, her name had resounded so many times in the silence, called by the failing voice of Aunt Clara.

It seemed to me that her death was the beginning of the end of the dwellers in our home; in my consciousness, this cat was bound like a long cherished plaything to the two well-beloved guardians of my hearthstone, seated there upon the bench, and to whom she had been a faithful companion in my absences afar. My sorrow was less for herself, inexplicable and uncertain little soul, than for her existence which

T W O C A T S

had just finished. It was like ten years of our own life that we had buried there in the earth.

